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[F.S. Aijazuddin](https://www.dawn.com/authors/1314/f-s-aijazuddin) Published December 29, 2022

The writer is an author.

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FEW will shed tears at the extinction of 2022. It has been a strange, unhappy year for almost everyone.

Perhaps the most disappointed is former prime minister Imran Khan. He found himself removed from office through a vote of no-confidence in the National Assembly. It was not the constitutional sleight of hand by the opposition that disconcerted him, but more the realisation that not everyone shared his overweening confidence in himself.

It takes a rare skill for any man to alienate himself from everyone useful to him.

Internationally, Imran Khan never found favour with US President Joe Biden, who ignored him for over three years. Prime minister Boris Johnson of the UK felt irretrievably let down after Imran Khan deliberately absented himself at COP26, held in Glasgow last year. He preferred instead to attend the Middle East Green Initiative summit convened by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman in Riyadh.

The affluent prince gradually lost interest in Imran Khan after their initial bromance. It did not help that he suspected that his diamond-studded gifts to his poor Pakistani fri­end were allegedly being peddled in Dubai.

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President Xi Jinping has not forgotten nor forgiven Imran Khan’s ill-advised tirades against CPEC. Its revival under his successor Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is a not so subtle message about who the Chinese prefer doing business with.

And President Putin and his generals must still be wondering why Imran Khan travelled to Moscow on the very day that Russia laun­ched its attack on Ukraine. On his return, Imran Khan explained that the visit had been made after discussing its pros and cons with the Foreign Office and some senior retired ambassadors.

The logic behind their advice to go to Moscow is questionable. It was as if the duke of the petty principality of Luxembourg had decided to visit Gen Eisenhower, just as D-Day was being launched on June 6, 1944.

Domestically, Imran Khan moans that during his prime ministership, he never enjoyed haqeeqi azadi (true independence) from his minder (retired) Gen Qamar Bajwa. He comp­l­ains that his avowed aim to retrieve wealth looted by the two Sharifs and Asif Ali Zardari was undermined by NAB and its disobedient chairman.

Imran Khan had hoped that before 2022 was out, the PDM government would have succumbed to the onslaught of his long marches and he would be back in PM House. Instead, he finds himself couch-bound, chafing, in his home in Zaman Park, Lahore, convalescing from wounds suffered during a botched attempt by an inept shooter.

He has time now to ponder why, for the first time in his charmed life, he has failed. Had he read Winston Churchill’s biography of Lord Nathaniel Curzon, he might have found the answer. Churchill noticed a character flaw in Curzon: he refused to stoop, and therefore could not conquer.

What will 2023 bring for his nemesis, the PDM government? At the moment, Pakistan, like some charpoy left out in the rain, is precariously balanced on its four uneven corners. Each province is at a different elevation, tilting away from the federalism of Islamabad.

The inescapable reality that confronts PM Shehbaz Sharif’s PDM coalition is the nation’s insolvency. ‘It’s the economy stupid’ — a phr­a­se coined by Bill Clinton’s adviser James Ca­rville in 1992, is even truer for Pakistan’s predicament today. When the problem is so starkly simple, why is the solution so difficult to achieve?

The answer is that our problems are immediate, their solutions long-term. We gain little by tinkering daily with the exchange rate. The economic wizards (if there are any, Ishaq Dar’s self-assessm­ent notwithstanding) of all the parties should sit together and def­ine a nat­io­nal economic stra­te­­gy. We no lon­ger have time to bick­­er among our­sel­v­­es. As Ben­ja­m­­in Franklin said in a different cont­ext: “We must all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”

To experience the uneven disparity within the classes in our country, one needs to drive through it — not on the Motorway from Lahore to Islam­abad, but from Lahore to Karachi on roads mangled by floods and pitted by overuse.

I lived in Sindh during the 1970s. The Sindh I drove through this week, 50 years later, is the residue of rapaciousness, a landfill of political neglect. And Karachi — once our capital city — competes with Mumbai as a vast slum with oases of luxurious living.

Will Pakistan survive? It is a question that too many ask. It will. Countries as overpopulated as ours do. Countries as indebted as ours are made to.

To steal from Churchill’s literary eloque­nce, his epitaph on Lord Curzon might well become a requiem for Pakistan: “Its morning had been golden, the noontide bronze, but the evening lead.”

The economies of other nations turn gol­den. Ours is still trapped in a Bronze Age.

*The writer is an author.*
[www.fsaijazuddin.pk](http://www.fsaijazuddin.pk)

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